

Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel

DATE	2 March 2026
REPORT OF	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	School Attendance, Attainment & Exclusions
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

School attendance, exclusions and attainment contribute both directly and indirectly to a number of areas of the Council Plan.

Education & skills and the future of the local economy are impacted by the outcomes children achieve from their education and the jobs they go on to have in the Borough. Safeguarding children by ensuring they are seen by professionals on a daily basis and reduces risk, which then impacts our communities.

Positive school attendance and strong academic outcomes, if achieved in their entirety, demonstrate a high value outcome with positive impacts socially, economically, and environmentally; both in the present and in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School attendance has continued to strengthen across North East Lincolnshire's schools, with strong partnership focus as both a protective factor and linked to future outcomes.

Exclusions have risen in some settings and reduced in others.

Attainment in primary schools is just below national for the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile – Good Level of Development, but above national in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check and the Key Stage 2 SATs.

Attainment in secondary schools remains below national across all measures.

Across both primary and secondary settings there is polarisation of outcomes, with large gaps between the highest and lowest performing settings.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

(Please explain what you are asking of the scrutiny panel. Reports to scrutiny should not be merely to note information.)

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 School Attendance

Whilst day-to-day support and oversight of school attendance is a responsibility retained by education settings, the Local Authority have duties and services to provide in line with statutory guidance from the Department for Education – Working

Together to Improve School Attendance 2024.

Local authority duties include establishing and managing systems related to legal interventions such as Fixed Penalty Notices and prosecutions; the provision of advice and guidance to schools; support multi-agency working; and the offer of Targeted Support Meetings to schools.

NELC also offer a traded service in addition to the statutory duties for schools who would like to purchase additional support from our experienced Education Welfare Officers.

Verified data from the 2024/25 academic year demonstrates a continually strengthening picture for school attendance across North East Lincolnshire, with an increase of 1.1% compared to the previous year.

Attendance measures for primary schools show that they out-perform regional and national comparators in all measures. Children's attendance in primary schools is better for all children, as well as when broken down to those eligible for Free School Meals, children with SEND and those with an EHCP. Persistent absence rates (children with below 90% attendance) are also better than regional and national comparators and statistical neighbours, with 12.9% of children missing 10% of more over the course of the academic year. Primary school attendance in North East Lincolnshire ranks our schools 42nd of 151 authorities in England.

Secondary schools have reduced the historic gaps to regional and national comparators compared to previous years, which is where most of the overall 1.1% improvement metric has originated. The gap to regional comparators has reduced to 0.8%, with a smaller gap for those on Free School Meals, and children with SEND at 1% variation from regional figures. Statistical neighbours for NELC perform slightly better than Yorkshire & Humber, with the gap to this figure also showing signs of narrowing compared to previous years.

The deeper analysis of secondary schools demonstrates a degree of polarisation in attendance figures, with a number of schools in line with national figures or outperforming them, and a number who are still experiencing challenges. The three secondary schools located most centrally in Grimsby: Havelock Academy, Ormiston Maritime Academy, and Oasis Academy Wintringham experienced attendance figures below 85% in the 2024/25 academic year; whereas Healing Academy, John Whitgift Academy and Humberston Academy each had attendance figures above 93% which exceeds national averages considerably. Targeted Support Meetings are prioritised for those settings where there is the greatest concern with regards to children and where local authority guidance could be most beneficial.

Our state-funded special schools have significantly out-performed all comparators across all children, those with Free School Meals, and children with an EHCP. Our special schools were ranked the best in England for school attendance in 2024/25.

Targeted Support Meetings held with schools to discuss strategies for supporting attendance and building relationships with wider services have yielded positive results, and have been well received by most settings. Officers ensure there is a focus on children with identified vulnerabilities within these meetings to support prioritisation of these groups with school attendance leaders. The improving picture particularly for our children with EHCPs and in receipt of Free School Meals

confirms this.

The Department for Education now create 'Similarity Reports' which benchmarks schools against their own statistical neighbours based on the nature of their cohort and location. Included within these reports are an Attendance Baseline Improvement Expectation (ABIE) figure, that the DfE expect schools to meet or exceed, and will progressively increase over time. Targeted Support Meetings make effective use of these reports which support identification of areas for improvement in a transparent way. Where schools do not meet their ABIE target, the local authority will discuss this with Headteachers and attendance leads and support with the development of an action plan. The DfE will monitor the progress towards ABIE targets for schools, and will allocate support from central government initiatives where there remain concerns over a period of time.

The new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework for schools has had a major overhaul. Whilst previous judgments were based on just four areas, there are now seven areas of judgment, with 'Attendance and Behaviour' being its own standalone section, with five possible outcomes from 'Urgent Improvement' to 'Exceptional'. This increased focus from the inspectorate further highlights the importance of inclusive approaches to attendance and behaviour, and brings more of a spotlight on these matters than the previous framework was capable of. Ofsted have access to attendance data for all schools and can utilise this to inform their inspections, allowing schools to showcase best practice or highlight where improvements can be made.

1.2 School Attainment

In the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, North East Lincolnshire's primary schools achieved 67% Good Level of Development (GLD) versus 68% nationally. North East Lincolnshire is currently ranked as the sixth best-performing county in the region, having improved by one position compared to the previous year. This is higher than the regional average of 66%. 21 schools achieved GLD scores below the national average.

Children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved 53.9% GLD, compared to the regional average of 51.4% and the national average of 49.7%. However, a significant attainment gap remains, with 71% of non-FSM children in the borough achieving a GLD compared to 53.9% of FSM eligible children. This is a very similar picture across the region and nationally.

North East Lincolnshire has fallen slightly below the national average for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) achieving 19% GLD compared to the national average of 20.6%

59.9% of boys achieved GLD compared to 73.6% of girls. This represents a slight increase in the gender attainment gap from the 2023/24 academic year. Unlike local trends, both regional and national data show a small decline in the gender gap over the same period.

Provisional data for Children in Our Care indicates that GLD has increased by 9% year on year, and our children's results are now just 1.1% below the England

average.

In the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) in Year 1, North East Lincolnshire achieved a pass rate of 81% versus 80% national average. The borough has moved from eighth place to third in the region for PSC results. 17 schools performed below the national average.

For the second consecutive year, 70.1% of children eligible for FSM achieved the pass mark in the PSC. This exceeds both the national average of 66.6% and the regional average of 68.6%.

For the third consecutive year, outcomes for children with SEND have fallen below both the national and regional averages in the PSC. This year, 41.1% of pupils with SEND achieved the pass mark, compared to 43.5% nationally and 44.6% regionally.

The gender gap in the PSC has narrowed within the borough for this academic year, with 77.3% of boys achieving the pass mark compared to 84% of girls.

At Key Stage 2, North East Lincolnshire achieved 64% for combined outcomes at the expected standard – Reading, Writing and Mathematics (RWM) - and has retained its position as top-performing county in the region for this measure. This represents a 1% increase compared to last year's results and exceeds both the regional average of 61% and the national average of 62%. 16 schools achieved below national for RWM, with four of these schools achieving significantly below with outcomes of 41% or below.

North East Lincolnshire is the top-performing county in the region for writing outcomes (76%) and mathematics outcomes (77%). Additionally, it ranks second in the region for reading outcomes at 75%, just behind York.

North East Lincolnshire is the top-performing county in the region for Greater Depth Standard (GDS) in writing, with 16%. It also ranks second for GDS outcomes in mathematics (26%) and combined subjects (9%). In reading, GDS stands at 29%, placing the county fourth in the region—slightly below the regional average of 30% and the national average of 33%.

The attainment gap between children eligible for FSM and those not eligible significantly reduced in North East Lincolnshire in 2024/25. 61.6% of FSM children achieved the expected standard in RWM, compared to 70.5% of non-FSM children. This represents a 10% reduction in the attainment gap for this cohort.

Disadvantaged children in six schools outperformed their non-disadvantaged peers: Weelsby Primary Academy; Laceby Stanford Primary Academy; Springfield Primary Academy; Laceby Acres Primary Academy; Humberston Cloverfields Academy and Humberston CE Primary School.

For the third consecutive year, children with SEND achieved lower than national and regional averages for the expected standard in RWM. 19.2% of children with SEND met the expected standard in RWM compared to 23.8% nationally and 23% regionally. Additionally, the attainment gap between SEND and non-SEND children has widened further during this academic year.

The gender gap in achieving the expected standard for RWM narrowed in 2024/25. 61.6% of boys achieved the standard, compared to 66.9% of girls. Both figures are above the regional and national averages for 2024/25.

KS2 provisional results for Children in Our Care have demonstrated a significant improvement in the Reading element compared to the 2023/24 academic year, placing North East Lincolnshire's children above the national average. KS2 Writing and Maths elements have provisionally moved to being in line with regional and national indicators.

The ten top performing schools at KS2 for 2024/25 are shown in the table below.

School	Trust	RWM 2025
Middlethorpe Primary Academy	Enquire	87.5%
Wybers Wood Academy	Delta	84.8%
Ormiston South Parade Academy	Ormiston	82.4%
Macaulay Primary Academy	Delta	79.2%
Woodlands Academy	HLT	78.1%
Humberston Cloverfields Academy	Enquire	77.8%
New Waltham Academy		77.6%
Edward Heneage Primary Academy	DRET	76.9%
Strand Primary Academy	Delta	76.9%
Thrunscoe Primary Academy		76.3%

The ten lowest performing schools at KS2 are shown in the table below.

School	Trust	RWM 2025
Yarborough Primary School		54.4%
Welholme Academy	Enquire	53.9%
Coomb Briggs Primary School	Wellspring	52.9%
Enfield Academy of New Waltham	Enquire	50.0%
St Peter's Church of England Primary	LAAT	50.0%
East Ravendale C of E Primary School	LAAT	41.2%
St Mary's Catholic Academy	Our Lady of Lourdes	40.7%
Grange Primary School	Maintained	33.3%
Oasis Academy Nunsthorpe	Oasis	30.6%
St Joseph's Catholic Primary Academy	Our Lady	8.3%

In terms of core attainment, 35.8% of pupils achieved grade 5 and above in the Basics English and mathematics measure; an increase of 3% from last year. Despite this improvement, performance remains below regional (43.3%) and national (45.2%) levels. Of the 10 secondary academies, only 3 were above national for grade 5 and above in English and maths: Healing – 61.7%, John Whitgift – 56% and Waltham Tollbar – 45.3%. The lowest performing school was

Beacon Academy with only 17.4% of pupils achieving grade 5 and above in both English and Maths.

This academic year, the Local Authority recorded an improvement in mathematics outcomes, with the proportion of pupils achieving grade 5 and above increasing from 38.1% to 41.0%. This represents a positive trend and has slightly narrowed the gap with the national figure of 51.0%.

Performance in English remained unchanged at 51.4%, which continues to fall below both national and regional averages.

1.3 School Exclusions

1.3.1 Permanent exclusions

A permanent exclusion is a measure that a Headteacher can take in the most serious of circumstances relating to a child in their setting. There is extensive legal precedent around exclusion law, and two legal tests must be met in order for a Headteacher to take this decision:

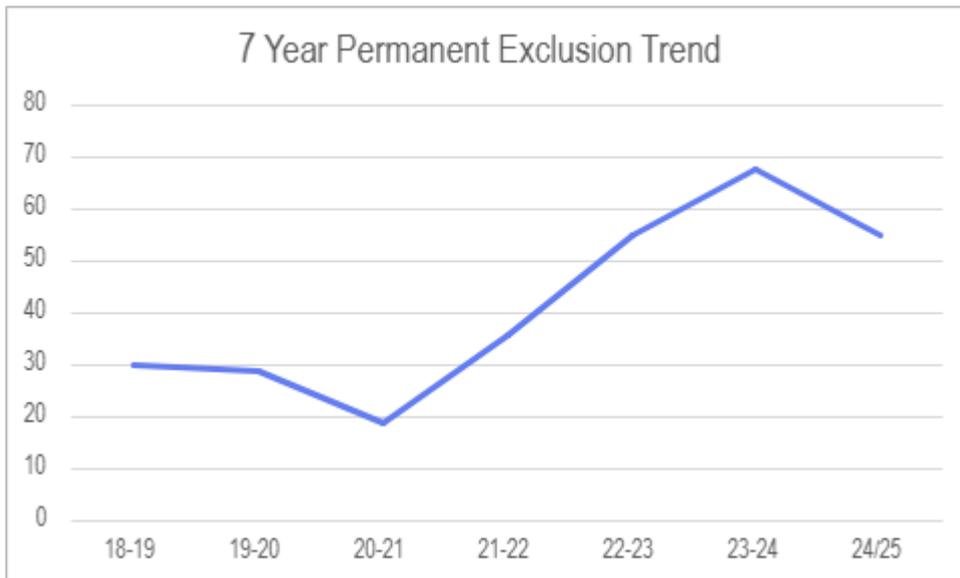
- 'in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and
- where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school.'

Following this decision, the Headteacher must ensure that relevant parties are informed, including the school's governors, the local authority, the child's parents, and the social worker and Virtual School head where relevant. A governor's meeting to scrutinise the decision and ensure all relevant policies have been followed by the Headteacher is held within 15 school days.

The local authority has a statutory duty to put in place education provision for a permanently excluded child from the sixth day of the exclusion. North East Lincolnshire Council have three commissioned settings for this provision depending on the age of the child. There is currently a re-commissioning project underway following Cabinet's decision in 2024 to establish a new Alternative Provision offer for North East Lincolnshire.

Long-term trends indicate a rise in permanent exclusions in North East Lincolnshire, reflecting the national trends, particularly post-COVID. However, Permanent exclusions in NEL reduced in number by 19% in the 2024/25 academic year.

The trend since 2020 for permanent exclusions has been that of exponential increase for North East Lincolnshire, our statistical neighbours, the region and nationally. North East Lincolnshire's rise has been more prominent since 2022 leading to being 50% higher than national rates at the end of the 2023/24 academic year. The rate in our statistical neighbours, however, is just 3% lower at this time.



The most commonly cited category for a permanent exclusion in North East Lincolnshire is 'persistent disruptive behaviour', which mirrors the category for most common reason for suspensions. This can often be a result of the DfE established categories for reporting, and can lack specificity in terms of the local authority's ability to drill deeper into the reasons for suspensions and permanent exclusions.

In the 2024/25 academic year, 90% of permanent exclusions were issued by secondary schools, with the trend reflecting that of school attendance with Ormiston Maritime Academy, Havelock Academy, The Academy Grimsby, Oasis Academy Wintringham and Cleethorpes Academy all excluding 5 or more children across the academic year. In contrast, Humberston Academy and Beacon Academy did not permanently exclude, and Tollbar Academy, Healing Academy, and John Whitgift conducted one exclusion each.

Five primary schools conducted one exclusion each in the 2024/25 academic year.

43% of permanent exclusions in the last five years have been children eligible for Free School Meals, demonstrating an over-representation of children with greater deprivation compared to the total NEL population. There are also significant over-representations of children who have been supported through Children's Social Care and Youth Justice services at some point in their life.

Children with SEND has overall reduced in proportion of permanent exclusions in North East Lincolnshire, however most of this reduction is for children with SEN Support within the school, standing at 31% of permanent exclusions in 2024/25. Exclusion numbers for children with an EHCP has remained relatively stable for the last five years, accounting for 25% of permanent exclusions in the 2024/25 academic year. For children with an EHCP, the local authority advocate for an emergency annual review of the child's needs and provision to take place prior to the decision to permanently exclude to allow for exploration of additional support for the child that may be needed.

Two Children in Our Care were permanent excluded in the 2024/25 academic year. Whilst the local authority recognises the rights and responsibilities of a Headteacher

to utilise a permanent exclusion, the Virtual School maintain the view as corporate parents that any permanent exclusion of a Child in Our Care will be challenged at the governor's panel, and will pursue an appeal at an Independent Review Panel with appropriate experts commissioned to ensure our children are advocated for in the most robust manner.

1.3.2 Suspensions

A suspension is where a pupil is temporarily removed from a school for one or more session (half a school day). A child can be suspended for a maximum of 45 school days in an academic year, across any number of incidences of suspension.

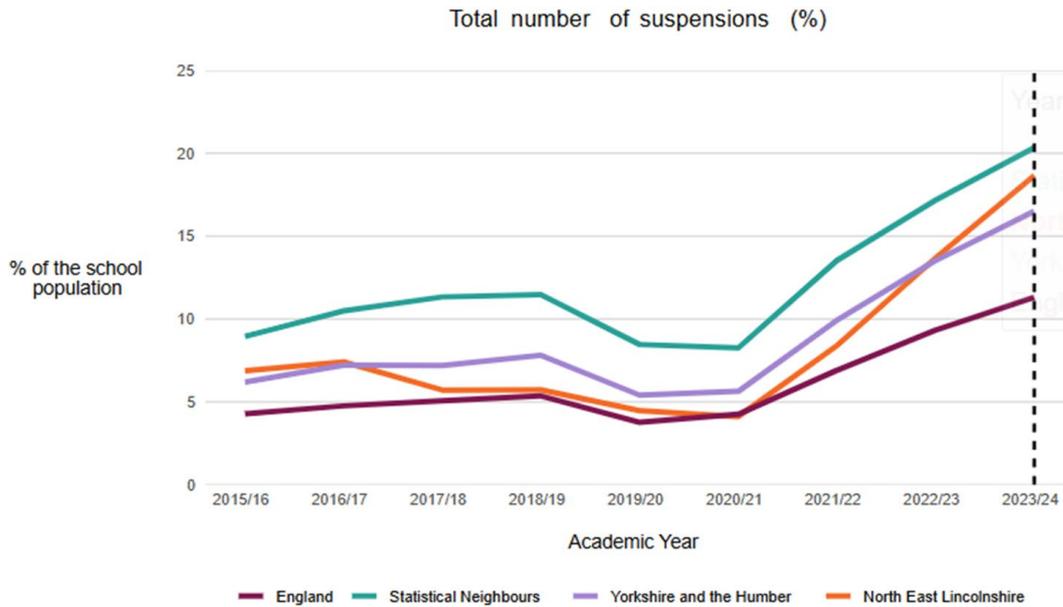
The Department for Education state that a suspension is 'an essential behaviour management tool' and that it 'may be used to provide a clear signal of what is unacceptable behaviour as part of the school's behaviour policy and show a pupil that their current behaviour is putting them at risk of permanent exclusion'. The DfE are also clear that 'where suspensions are becoming a regular occurrence for a pupil, headteachers and schools should consider whether suspension alone is an effective sanction for the pupil and whether additional strategies need to be put in place to address behaviour'.

Suspensions across the country have increased significantly post-pandemic. North East Lincolnshire had historically been lower than regional counterparts and statistical neighbours, and more closely to in line with national figures. However we have been adversely affected following the pandemic, bringing us closer to statistical neighbours. North East Lincolnshire's number of suspensions has increase 60% in 2024/25 compared to the previous academic year, which can mostly be attributed to children of secondary school age.

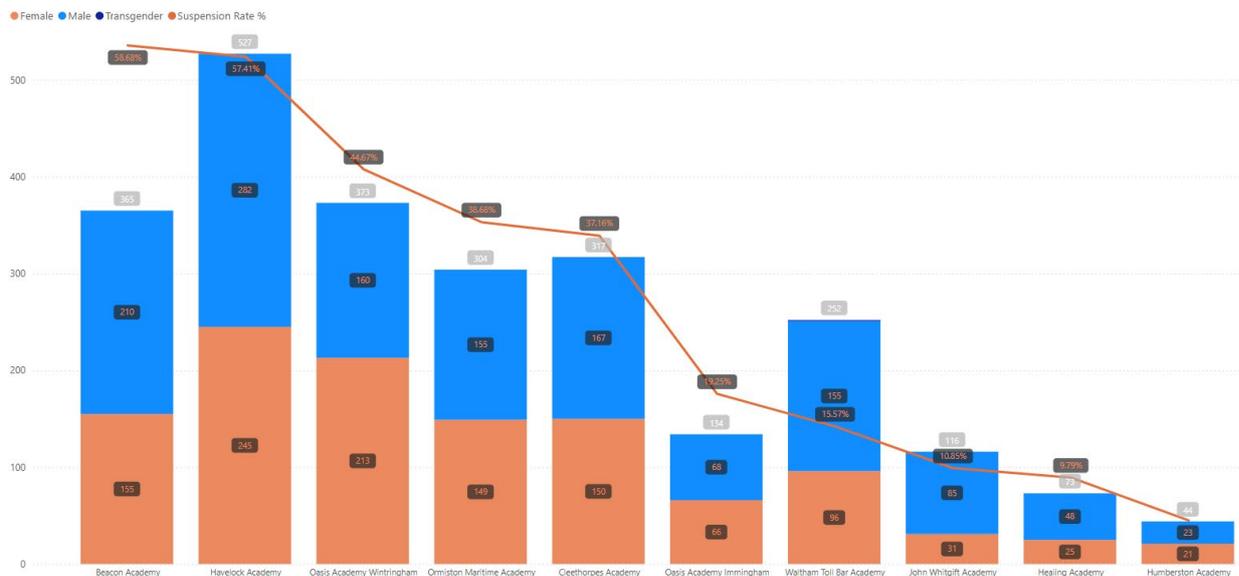
There were 3,452 suspensions across North East Lincolnshire in the 2024/25 academic year, with the impact of 7,656 days of education lost as a result.

Secondary schools made up 94% of suspensions in North East Lincolnshire, which means our primary settings permanently exclude at a lower rate than national figures would indicate, which is around 12% of all suspensions.

Data for the 2024/25 academic year, however, does show that our primary schools suspend for proportionally longer periods of time per incident, at more than 3 days average compared to closer to 2 days for secondary suspensions.



The graph below, showing secondary schools ordered by % rate based on the number of children they have on roll, evidences similar patterns to those described for permanent exclusions and attendance, whereby schools located in the most deprived wards experience greater challenges than those on the geographic peripheries of the Borough in suburban areas.



Deeper analysis shows that the largest percentage increases year-on-year from a cohort perspective are for primary school children with SEN Support and with a social worker, and the smallest percentage increases being for secondary aged children with an EHCP or with a social worker.

The Virtual School supports schools and partners in social care with advice and guidance around supporting attendance and behaviour needs of children with a social worker as part of their 'Extended Duties' remit. Whilst there have been increases in the numbers of children with a social worker being suspended, 195 suspensions have occurred in total, equating to 5.6% of all suspensions.

As with attendance and permanent exclusions, the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework has strengthened its focus on children who are not attending,

and those who are being suspended or excluded from schools. Ofsted expect inclusive approaches to be taken, and can grade from 'Urgent Improvement' to 'Exceptional' in terms of the standards set in the framework. Multi-Academy Trusts are already working on improving approaches and policies across schools to improve inspection outcomes under the new framework, which over time should yield positive results for children.

The Department for Education are developing the Schools White Paper due for release this year, which will outline changes to inclusion and SEND. Early publications indicate that secondary schools will be expected to each have an 'inclusion base', with recognition that suspension and exclusion figures have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels and that the drive for 'Ordinarily Available Provision' can still be enhanced and made more consistent across the country.

The local authority's re-commissioning of Alternative Provision is another key driver at a local level to reduce suspensions by supporting children to remain in mainstream settings. This project was approved at Cabinet in 2025, and is currently drawing insights from across the partnership and from children and families to ensure that the best offer can be commissioned going forward.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

A risk exists in the disparity of educational attainment outcomes across schools in the local authority, across all key stages.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There are potential positive and negative reputational implications for the Council resulting from the attainment outcomes across all key stages of education. The Council has limited influence over the primary and secondary schools in the area; there are only 4 maintained primary schools out of 48, and all of the secondary schools are academies. Whilst some schools are performing exceptionally well, too many are achieving below the national average. There is more work to be done to ensure that all children and young people are able to achieve good outcomes throughout each stage of their educational journey.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct financial implications for the Council in relation to the contents of this report.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

It is essential that all of our schools and academies deliver the best possible academic outcomes for all of our children and young people so that they can succeed, thrive and secure their career of choice.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications on climate change, nature recovery and the environment.

7. PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND MARMOT IMPLICATIONS

Inequalities at a national level are known to exist for children who have poor attendance or who have been excluded from school. Some reports identify over 40% of the prison population have a history of exclusion from school. The Children's Commissioner has stated "twice as likely to be in the care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and 10 times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems."

8. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

9. WARD IMPLICATIONS

The contents of this report are Borough-wide and do not have implications on any specific ward areas.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No relevant background papers

11. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Joseph White – Deputy Service Director – Inclusion
Wendy Jackson – Deputy Service Director – School Standards & Education Partnerships

Ann-Marie Matson – Director of Children's Services